

Comments on the Art Market

B Y R E H S G A L L E R I E S

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FOR MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Howard Rehs

We never truly know what each new day will bring, and for me, one day in October marked the beginning of an unexpected journey. I woke up with a sensation as if someone had struck a match in my throat. There was an intense burning feeling, and I noticed an unusual amount of saliva—as if my body was trying to extinguish the fire.

As time passed, my speech began to slur, I had trouble swallowing, the inside of my mouth was swollen, and I laughed uncontrollably—even in serious situations. It was odd and unsettling. I called my oldest and dearest friend, Dr. Donald Teplitz (Chief Medical Officer at Good Samaritan Hospital), and saw several doctors, but none could pinpoint the cause. Eventually, I got an

appointment with a neurologist, who told my wife—without telling me directly—that she suspected a form of ALS.

That same week, I shared the news with my family. My brother Alan happened to know someone connected to Project ALS, and on December 12, Amy and I attended a fundraising event at Hirshleifers in Manhasset, where we had the pleasure of meeting LL Cool J. More importantly, through this event, we connected with someone who helped us arrange a meeting with Dr. Jinsy Andrews, one of the top ALS specialists at Columbia.

Shortly after, I met with Dr. Andrews, who was incredible, spending over two hours with me, Amy & Lance before determining that I most likely have Pseudobulbar Palsy. I underwent several tests—breathing assessments, an EMG, and more—before starting on a few medications. Nuedexta is supposed to control the uncontrollable laughter (so far, not much luck), and Riluzole is used to slow the progression. Though frustratingly, there's no way to know if it's actually working.

This week, we again met with Dr. Andrews, who spent an unbelievable amount of time with us and is adding some new medications and will keep me updated on upcoming clinical trials.

I have always believed that the people we meet and work with are friends; some become so close that we consider them family. So, I wanted to share this with everyone so that if we talk, you'll understand why I might sound like I've had one too many drinks. Sadly, I am not drinking anymore, but if you click on the links you can see me making my favorites: [Lava Flows](#), [Sangria](#) and one of several different [Kamikazes](#). Despite everything, I'm still driving in and out of the city daily, participating in fairs, researching, buying and selling art, unveiling new pieces, packing up sold works, and—most importantly—enjoying my entire family (who have been so kind and helpful). I also want to thank those who gave us ideas, leads, connections, prayers, etc. We will do everything we can to beat this!

On a side note, every time my adorable granddaughter, Teddy, smiles at me, she triggers that crazy laughter,

and as I recently said to my son Lance, at least I will go out laughing!!!

I wish everyone a beautiful life and sincerely hope you never have to deal with something like this.

Current Exhibition



Introducing Bryan Larsen & Stellar Perspectives: The Art of Space and Imagination

For centuries, the vast expanse of space has captivated the human imagination, inspiring artists, scientists, and dreamers alike. The allure of the cosmos has shaped myths, fueled scientific advancements, and found its way into the realm of art, where visionaries translate our celestial curiosity into breathtaking visual narratives. Rehs Contemporary Galleries is proud to celebrate this rich artistic tradition with a special exhibition introducing Bryan Larsen, along side Julie Bell, David Palumbo, Tony South, and Beth Sistrunk—artists whose works bridge the gap between science, imagination, and artistic craftsmanship.

Artists have long sought to depict the mysteries of the universe, from ancient civilizations mapping the stars onto cave walls and ceramics to the Renaissance masters incorporating celestial elements into their paintings. During the Scientific Revolution, space-themed art became intertwined with discoveries in astronomy, with artists like Johannes Vermeer subtly integrating celestial globes and telescopic observations into their compositions. The 20th century saw an explosion of space-inspired art, particularly with the advent of the Space Age. The works of Chesley Bonestell, often called the "father of modern space art," gave visual form to scientific theories, influencing both public perception and NASA's space exploration goals.

Art has the power to shape how we see the world—and the universe beyond. Space art serves as both inspiration and aspiration, encouraging technological advancements and exploration. The works of Bryan Larsen, for example, seamlessly blend scientific curiosity with artistic expression, presenting a future where humankind reaches beyond Earth's boundaries with optimism and determination. His paintings emphasize achievement and innovation, envisioning a world where space is not just a frontier but a home for humanity's highest aspirations.

David Palumbo's *Red 5 Standing By* pays tribute to Star Wars, blending pop culture with space exploration in a visually striking homage. Beth Sistrunk's *In Orbit* brings a whimsical narrative to the show, featuring two cats peering out of a rocket ship in space with Earth visible in the distance, merging curiosity with adventure. Tony South's signature bulldog in *Million to One*, reimagined in a futuristic space helmet, injects humor and character into the concept of space travel, making the unknown feel familiar and inviting.

Perhaps one of the most profound aspects of space art is its ability to ignite the imagination. Larsen, who finds inspiration in science, engineering, and architecture, emphasizes the importance of viewing the future through an optimistic lens. His work is not about depicting distant, unattainable worlds but rather offering glimpses of what might soon be possible. His fascination with children as subjects underscores the idea that the future belongs to those who dream—those who look up at the night sky and see not an empty void, but a canvas of potential.

Children, Larsen notes, often approach the unknown with unbridled enthusiasm, seeing space as a place of adventure rather than fear. His art reflects this youthful optimism, portraying a world where the next generation continues the journey into the stars. Through his work, viewers are invited to rekindle their own sense of wonder and possibility.

This March we invite you to explore the universe through the eyes of these remarkable artists. The exhibition will showcase a selection of works that celebrate the vastness of space, the ingenuity of humankind, and the boundless potential of the imagination. Whether through Larsen's visionary narratives, Bell's celestial figures, Palumbo's imaginative compositions, Sistrunk's charming cosmic explorers, or South's iconic bulldog-astronaut, each piece on view serves as a reminder that space art is not just about the stars—it's about the dreams that propel us forward..

Join us in celebrating the power of art to inspire, innovate, and illuminate the path to the future. After all, before we can reach the stars, we must first dare to imagine them.

Upcoming Fair

THE PHILADELPHIA SHOW

The show takes place in April and we will have two booths. One featuring our historical works and the other with several of our contemporary artists' paintings.

Preview Party

Thursday, April 24th

General Show Dates

Friday, April 25: 11:00 am – 7:00 pm
Saturday, April 26: 11:00 am - 6:00 pm
Sunday, April 27: 11:00 am - 5:00 pm

We will let you know when we receive our complimentary tickets.

Stocks & Crypto

This is going to be a recurring theme going forward... me trying to not be political, and yet, people will think I'm being political. Oh well.

I'm going to keep this one brief... February was not a good month for the major indexes, or for the economy at large. There is a ton of volatility and not much is being done to ease market concerns... I'm writing this on the heels of watching President Trump argue with President Zelenskyy in front of a gaggle of reporters inside the Oval Office. Mind you, they were trying to negotiate a mineral resources deal, which fell apart in the process. And while stocks rallied a bit as we closed out the month, we still saw losses across the board. The Dow has given up 1.6% this month, while the NASDAQ slid nearly 4%! The S&P was the best of the bunch with a 1.4% decline through February. Mind you, this is all on the back of the current administration reiterating their intention of imposing tariffs on Canada and Mexico, along with discussions of expanding tariffs to the EU – this is an isolationist strategy and may result in our diminished role in international affairs, including trade and military cooperation. I get it, the idea here is to spur domestic production and self-reliance, but in real world practice, this is a risky strategy and will likely lead to hardships for the vast majority of the population. I'm trying to be nice here, so let's just leave it there for now.

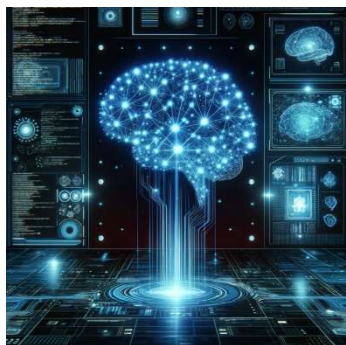
As for currencies and commodities... the Pound and Euro saw some light fluctuations but remained mostly stable – the Pound strengthened relative to the dollar by about 0.9%, while the Euro weakened about 0.6%. Crude slid about 4.5% through February, but gold continued pushing the limits... it was up nearly 5% for the month, which continues an insane winning streak – in the last 12 months we're talking a 40+% return! Wowza!

I think I'd be doing everyone a service if we just skipped crypto altogether, because it is looking scary out there right now. Bitcoin has fallen off a cliff after hovering in the \$100K ballpark... just today (Friday), it dipped below the \$80K threshold, with analysts wondering if the \$70K support level will be tested next week. Ethereum has given up nearly 30% this month as it sits in the \$2K region. Somehow Litecoin bucked the trend and has actually seen a decent rally – it's trading up more than 16% for the month when everything else is falling.

What does it all mean? No one knows, and if they say they do, don't believe them. I'll just be here wishing everyone the best of luck as they figure out the basics of egg farming.

Tales From The Dark Side

Institutions Lean Into AI, Despite Artists' Objections



AI

The Getty Museum has acquired its very first AI-generated photograph for its collection. This comes despite both ethical and legal concerns about the production and curation of AI-generated works of art.

[Cristian en el Amor de Calle](#) is an AI-generated photograph by the Costa Rican photographer Matías Sauter Morera. It shows two young men in blue leather jackets sitting together, both looking at the viewer. Much of Sauter Morera's work focuses on identity, with this work, part of a larger series, looking at the intersection of queerness and *latinidad*. The photograph is said to be inspired by the *pegamachos*, the farmhands and ranch workers in Costa Rica's Guanacaste province, bordering the Pacific Ocean. These Costa Rican cowboys would, beginning in the 1970s, engage in love affairs with local men while not abandoning the label of heterosexual. The use of AI in Sauter Morera's work is partly to protect the identities of actual gay men in the country. Even though

Costa Rica is considered progressive for Central America as far as queer rights are concerned, precautions still need to be taken in some parts of the country.

Sauter Morera used a combination of AI models in Adobe Photoshop to generate his images. The Getty Museum acquired *Cristian en el Amor de Calle* through Paul Martineau, an associate curator at the Getty Museum's Department of Photographs. Despite the focus on AI, Martineau and the Getty consider the work primarily a photograph instead of an AI-generated artwork. *Cristian en el Amor de Calle* will be featured at Sauter Morera's solo exhibition at Craig Krull Gallery in Santa Monica starting on March 22nd before moving to a group show at the Getty Museum beginning June 17th.

The ethics of using AI in this context is rather complicated. In this specific case, Sauter Morera used it to generate the desired image without compromising the identities of queer people, whose lives and livelihoods may be at risk depending on their location. However, many segments of the art world, particularly artists, have been rallying against the greater inclusion of AI in their spaces. [An open letter signed by thousands of artists](#) recently called upon Christie's to cancel an upcoming auction dedicated to AI-generated art. It's a relatively small sale, with only thirty-four lots expected to make around \$600K. However, regardless of its size, the sale may be used in the same way that the sale of Beeple's NFT works at Christie's legitimized a creative medium that is now starting to quickly fall out of favor. Many fear that this auction may generate publicity and lend legitimacy to art created not by an artist who may be struggling to support themselves, but by a machine trained on millions of images. Refik Anadol, one of the artists participating in the scheduled Christie's sale, commented that the letter was an example of "lazy critic practices and doomsday hysteria driven by dark minds." However, on top of the ethical concerns, there are ongoing legal battles regarding the nature of art generated through AI models.

In recent court battles, judges in the United States [have allowed lawsuits to continue against the technology companies](#) that developed the several main AI models used today. Last August, Judge William Orrick wrote that because many of the AI image generators could create a work in another artist's style simply by using the artist's name as a prompt, the technology companies that developed these generators may be liable for trademark and copyright infringement. He wrote that these programs were "created to facilitate [copyright] infringement by design". Kelly McKernan and Karla Ortiz, two of the artists party to that lawsuit, are signatories

to the open letter to Christie's. The letter reads, "These [AI] models, and the companies behind them, exploit human artists, using their work without permission or payment to build commercial AI products that compete with them." Despite arranging the sale, Christie's vice president Nicole Sales Giles insisted that the auction house believes that "AI is not a replacement for human creativity."

The Christie's sale, called Augmented Intelligence, is still scheduled to close on March 5th.

Cleveland Museum Agrees To Repatriate

The Cleveland Museum of Art is sending a Roman bronze statue back to Turkey after finally acknowledging the work was likely looted.

In September 2023, I first wrote about how the Cleveland Museum of Art became the target of the Manhattan District Attorney's office because of [a bronze statue in its Greco-Roman collection](#). The museum initially acquired the work in 1986, and for decades, it was known by the name *The Emperor as Philosopher, possibly Marcus Aurelius*. It was one of the highlights of the museum's antiquities collection. In 2012, the Turkish government first notified American authorities that the statue was likely stolen from an archaeological site and trafficked out of the country in the 1960s. The ancient city of Bubon in southwestern Turkey was first excavated by local farmers in 1966. It would be nearly a year before Turkish authorities realized that artifacts were being removed from the site and sold to smugglers. The specific structure from which many artifacts were taken was known as the Sebasteion, a sort of terrace overlooking the city's main forum used as a local shrine to the emperors.



Draped Male Figure, previously The Emperor as Philosopher

As part of an investigation into the international smuggling operation that trafficked the Bubon bronzes from Turkey to the United States, the Manhattan DA's office identified several other bronzes in American museums linked to the same site. They have since confiscated works [from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Fordham University](#). The Cleveland Museum had the opportunity to turn over the statue voluntarily but refused. They went so far as to modify the work's information on their website to fit a narrative allowing them to keep the statue. The museum renamed the work *Draped Male Figure* and deleted any reference to its place of origin. A New York judge later issued a warrant allowing the work to be seized, leading the Cleveland Museum [to file a lawsuit contesting the seizure](#). And now, nearly eighteen months later, the museum now acquiesces and renounces all claims to the statue.

Part of the negotiations between the Cleveland Museum and the Manhattan DA's office involved further study of the sculpture to determine its place of origin more definitively. Specialists have since run tests on the statue, which have revealed new information about the work. While the statue was initially believed to depict the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius in the robes of a philosopher, new research shows that may not be true. Antiquarians initially suspected the headless statue depicted the emperor and Stoic philosopher because of an empty plinth bearing Marcus Aurelius's name. However, after studying the statue, specialists now see that the pegs in its feet meant to anchor the work to its base do not match the holes on the Marcus Aurelius plinth. However, they match a different plinth that lacks any markings or inscriptions.

The Manhattan District Attorney's office has now repatriated a total of fifteen objects looted from the Bubon site, collectively worth around \$100 million. The Cleveland Museum will continue exhibiting the statue before it is officially repatriated to Turkey.

Elizabeth Street Garden Clings On With A New Lawsuit



The Elizabeth Street Garden (photo courtesy of [Elizabeth Street Garden, Inc.](#))

The nonprofit organization that maintains the Elizabeth Street Garden in Manhattan has filed a lawsuit against New York City to prevent its land from being used for an apartment building.

The continuing story of the Elizabeth Street Garden has been going on for over a decade in lower Manhattan. The park and statue garden used to be a vacant lot left over after a previous building's demolition. Starting in the early 1990s, a local gallery owner named Allan Reiver began turning the space into a community garden complete with salvaged benches, chairs, tables, bird baths, statues, and columns sourced from all over New York and beyond. The garden began receiving increased attention in 2012 when the city housing authority

announced that a new development project, Haven Green, would be using the plot. The Haven Green project would include affordable housing, office space, and urban green spaces. Since then, the nonprofit organization called the Elizabeth Street Garden (ESG) has fought alongside residents of the Nolita neighborhood and many others to beat back the developers and some politicians. The fight to preserve the Elizabeth Street Garden has gained support from many prominent New York City residents, including Robert De Niro and Patti Smith. Many believed last year was the end of a long resistance when a court ruled that the ESG's lease of the land from the city would end in October 2024. However, the ESG has now filed another suit claiming that the garden is protected under federal law.

The organization claims that the Elizabeth Street Garden is a work of public art, and is therefore protected under the Visual Artists Rights Act, passed by Congress in 1990. There is precedent for using VARA to preserve public art, but the tactic is not always sound. In 2018, after developers painted over street art at the 5Pointz mural space in Long Island City, Queens, [a court awarded the artists \\$6.75 million in damages](#). However, claiming protection under VARA does not always work, as seen by a recent incident where the Des Moines Art Center [was permitted to destroy a piece of environmental art by Mary Miss](#). According to the ESG, the garden itself is a "social sculpture" created and maintained by the ESG organization and the broader community.

Many feel torn when it comes to this issue. While my first instinct was to throw in my lot with the ESG, I had to weigh the pros and cons. Yes, having a beautiful community garden is wonderful. It is [a desperately needed third place](#) for many members of the community. It serves as a green space for people to relax, reflect, and appreciate the little bits of nature that can be difficult to come by in Manhattan. However, on the other side, the fact that the Haven Green project includes affordable housing causes a complication. Housing prices continue to go up and up, and apartment buildings devoted to affordable housing help to keep that in check, as it affects rent prices for the surrounding area. So, what began as a clear choice has become more complicated. To many, it seems the decision before them is to either protect a public space that has a valuable purpose in its community, or to help people struggling to afford the basic necessities.

However, the two sides have come closer together since the initial confrontation started in 2012. Since then, the Haven Green development has promised to incorporate more green spaces as a concession. The ESG has also researched what other spaces in the area are suitable for construction and could be used in Haven Green to spare the garden. Some spots they have recommended include 271 Bowery, 2 Howard Street, and 388 Hudson Street. However, as many have noted, it's not as simple as just picking a new space for development. There's probably an incredible amount of regulatory hurdles and paperwork that must be done for the project to be approved, something that has already been done. The new lawsuit has a slim chance of succeeding, and the Haven Green project will likely go ahead. What the Haven Green project offers is necessary, but that doesn't mean I will not be sad if the Elizabeth Street Garden disappears.

The Art Market

Christie's NY Old Master & British Drawings



Head of a Woman
by Jacopo Ligozzi

The Old Master and British Drawings sale at Christie's kicked off the Classic Week of nineteenth-century and Old Master sales being held at the New York auction houses starting on February 4th. This sale was highly anticipated mostly because of a recently rediscovered J.M.W. Turner watercolor that would be crossing the block. However, the top spot was a chalk drawing by a sixteenth-century Italian artist. *Head of a Woman* by Jacopo Ligozzi was among the handful of highly-valued lots featured at Christie's on Tuesday, with an estimate range of \$200K to \$300K. The drawing shows a woman in profile with an elaborate headdress featuring gold chains, ribbons, and an enormous pearl. It last came to auction in 1993 at Phillips, selling for £108K. It is one part of a series of seven drawings Ligozzi created while working at the court of the Medici family in Florence, likely in the 1570s. The head drawing exceeded its estimate, hammering at \$400K (or \$504K w/p).

The famous Turner watercolor was expected to be the sale's top lot but came in just behind the Ligozzi drawing. As I wrote several weeks ago, [when the watercolor first made the news](#), the work was previously in the collection of a British civil servant, who believed it was by the Victorian art critic John Ruskin. It's been over a century since the painting has been at auction, last selling at Christie's London in 1920 for 165 guineas (or about £6.6K in 2025). The watercolor was created in the final decade of Turner's life, on his third and final visit to Venice. This was when he was growing increasingly experimental in his technique. Many have pointed out that his method of landscape painting likely [greatly influenced the impressionist generation later in the century](#). The watercolor is incredibly rare, as the Yale Center for British Art is the only place outside Britain and Ireland where any of Turner's Venetian watercolors are kept. Therefore, the Christie's estimate of \$300K to \$500K seems understandable. Unfortunately, the Venetian watercolor failed to meet expectations, hammering at \$260K (or \$327.6K w/p). Immediately after was another Turner watercolor. *Binger Loch and Mäuseturm* is a slightly less abstract work, likely created during his 1817 trip to continental Europe, producing around fifty watercolors. The present work shows the Rhine River and the Mäuseturm shoal near Bingen am Rhein. Turner ended up creating a total of three watercolors based on sketches he made of the area. Estimated to sell for between \$200K and \$300K, *Binger Loch and Mäuseturm* sold for slightly underestimate, like the Venetian watercolor. It hammered at \$180K (or \$226.8K w/p).



The Approach to Venice
by J.M.W. Turner



Binger Loch and Mäuseturm
by J.M.W. Turner

There were a few surprises at Christie's, with five of the one hundred nineteen available lots selling for more than double their high estimates. However, two were noteworthy because they sold for 4.7 times what was expected. Both are sixteenth-century drawings by Italian artists. The first, a red chalk drawing showing [a cherub's head](#) by Michelangelo Anselmi, sold for \$28K (or \$35.3K w/p) against a \$6K high estimate. The other is a double-sided ink drawing by Domenico Campagnola showing [a nude man next to a tree](#) on one side, with [two figures fighting each other](#) on the other. It sold for \$14K (or \$17.6 w/p) against a \$3K high estimate. Of the one hundred nineteen available lots, twenty-three sold within their estimates, giving Christie's specialists a 19% accuracy rate. The largest bulk of the lots sold below estimate, totaling forty-eight (40%) lots. An additional twenty-six lots (22%) sold above their estimates, while the

remaining twenty-two (18%) went unsold, giving Christie's an 82% sell-through rate. The sale brought in a total of \$1.68 million (or \$2.1 million w/p) against a presale total low estimate of \$1.61 million.

Sotheby's NY Master Works On Paper



The Beach at Wieck near Greifswald
by Caspar David Friedrich

The results of Classic Week at the New York auction houses have been somewhat mixed. While the main Old Master and nineteenth-century paintings sales at both Christie's and Sotheby's were somewhat disappointing, the same cannot be said for the Sotheby's Master Works on Paper sale. The sale's top lot was *The Beach at Wieck near Greifswald*, an ink drawing by the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich, who appropriately is getting a major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art starting this upcoming Saturday. The drawing shows an overturned rowboat on a beach while large sailing ships cross the water in the background. Sotheby's specialists note that Friedrich's landscapes often contained great amounts of allegory and symbolism. In the present case, boats on the water or on the beach usually represent the transience of life. Sotheby's definitely predicted the drawing to become one of the sale's stars with an estimate of \$250K and \$350K, one of three lots to receive this estimate. Bidding, however, continued well past the high estimate mark, with the drawing hammering at \$600K (or \$720K w/p).

Similar to the Christie's sale the day before, J.M.W. Turner was one of the most popular artists in New York for Classic Week. Sotheby's expected the watercolor *Light-towers of Le Havre, France* to do rather well, even if they did not peg it as one of the top works. The combination of bold colors with the airy, almost ethereal nature of not only the sky and the water but also the way the scene sort of just fades away like a dream likely made the work very attractive to buyers. It surpassed its \$150K high estimate by 2.3 times, hammering at \$350K (or \$420K w/p). Finally, rounding everything out was a pair of lots that achieved the same hammer price, one selling within estimate and the other vastly exceeding it. The first was another Turner watercolor, *The Falls of Schaffhausen*, one of ten paintings of the subject created during a trip through Switzerland in the early 1840s. The work may seem dull, filled with lots of brown and gray. This seems especially so when compared to the Le Havre watercolor. However, it was another one of the three \$250K to \$350K lots in the sale, selling with an estimate at \$280K (or \$336K w/p). However, the lot immediately preceding it caused quite a stir, as it made the same hammer price yet was predicted to sell for no more than \$20K. The painting of *Vesuvius, Italy* by the British watercolorist Samuel Palmer is a very small work, measuring barely 5 by 7 inches. It shows the famous Italian volcano amid an eruption, which the artist writes as having taken place in August 1838. It has been in the same private collection for over a century, having received it from the artist's son. It is by far one of the biggest auction surprises of the year, having achieved a hammer price 14 times its high estimate.



Light-towers of Le Havre, France by J.M.W. Turner



The Falls of Schaffhausen, Switzerland by J.M.W. Turner

Beyond some of the top lots, like the Palmer and the Le Havre Turner watercolor, several other lots did exceptionally well. Eight of the fifty-four available lots sold for more than double their high estimates. They also included the very first lot, a chalk drawing attributed to Jacques Bellange called *Five Men Drinking*. It shows a group of men seated at a table with incredibly tall drinking glasses, said by Sotheby's specialists to be typical of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lorraine, where the artist was from. The subject is very jovial, seemingly taken out of a Verdi opera, making it unsurprising that it sold for as much as it did. Predicted to sell for no more than \$20K, the chalk drawing eventually sold for 3.25 times its high estimate at \$65K (or \$78K w/p). From the Renaissance to the *fin de siècle*, the very last lot of the sale was a pencil drawing by the Austrian master Gustav Klimt. *Young Woman, Crouching* is a rather simple sketch on

brown paper, signed not by the artist but by his sister Hermine, who marked it as previously belonging to her brother before coming into her possession. Against a high estimate of \$12K, the simple drawing attracted far more attention than expected and sold for \$38K (or \$45.6K w/p), 3.17 times the estimate.

One of the highly valued lots, *an ink drawing by Claude Lorraine* estimated to sell for between \$150K and \$200K, unfortunately failed to sell. However, this did not seem to affect sales success in any way. Of the fifty-four available lots, eleven sold within their estimates, giving Sotheby's specialists a 20% accuracy rate. Eighteen lots sold above and below their estimates (18%), while seven went unsold. This gave Sotheby's a 93% sell-through rate on Wednesday. Some lots, like the Friedrich and the Palmer, selling for far above their estimates not only brought the sale as a hole within its total estimate but also brought it up and over. All fifty-four lots were expected to sell for no more than \$2.86 million. In the end, the forty-seven lots that did sell brought in \$2.88 million (or \$3.46 million w/p) for Sotheby's.

Lost Claudel Sculpture Sold In Paris For €3.1 Million

A bronze sculpture by Camille Claudel thought to have been lost for over a century sold in Paris for €3.1 million.

Recently, I feel like the art world has been reanalyzing the work of great female artists, especially those who, previously, were mainly known for their relationships with great male artists. I've written several times about Françoise Gilot, her ten-year relationship with Pablo Picasso, and how, since her passing, her work has begun to receive greater attention and respect from academics, collectors, and museum-goers. This is especially true in France, *where she had been a pariah* thanks to Picasso's influence after she broke off their relationship. Something very similar seems to have happened to Camille Claudel, the great French sculptor mainly known as the student and companion of Auguste Rodin.



The Musée d'Orsay version of *La Jeunesse et L'Âge Mûr* by Camille Claudel

La Jeunesse et L'Âge Mûr (Youth and the Age of Maturity) is a bronze sculpture Claudel began creating around 1894, around two years after she and Rodin separated. The French government initially commissioned the sculpture, but they canceled the contract several years later, before Claudel could cast anything in bronze. The work shows three nude figures: a young woman is on her knees, taking an older man by the hand, almost beckoning him to stay. Meanwhile, an older woman is drawing him away. It is meant to represent the progression of life and aging. Some, however, have interpreted the work as representative of Claudel's romantic life with Rodin. The main reason why Rodin broke things off with Claudel is because he wanted to prioritize the relationship he had with Rose Beuret, with whom he had a son. So many have interpreted *La Jeunesse et L'Âge Mûr* as representing Beuret taking Rodin away from Claudel. Many have noticed that the young kneeling woman does bear a resemblance to the artist, while the male figure is someone reminiscent of Rodin's work [Les Bourgeois de Calais](#).

The work was rediscovered in an abandoned apartment last year, making it the fourth still-existing casting of the statue. The Musée d'Orsay, the Musée Claudel, and the Musée Rodin own the other versions. This one was cast in 1907 from the same mold as the Musée Claudel version. These versions are part of a series of six and were made at one-third the size of the earlier castings. The bronze was consigned to the auction house Philocale, whose employees were the ones to discover the statue as they were asked to take an inventory of the apartment's contents by the new owner. On Sunday, *La Jeunesse et L'Âge Mûr* crossed the block with specialists anticipating that it would sell for between €1.5 million and €2 million. The Claudel would end up doubling that number, selling for €3.1 million (or €3.7 million w/p), becoming the second most valuable work by the artist ever sold. Claudel's auction record was set in 2013 at Sotheby's London when her 1892 work [La Valse](#) sold for £5.1 million (about \$8 million).

This is just another milestone in the greater appreciation of Claudel's work. Many point to 1988 as the time the general public began to reevaluate her life and career since that year saw the release of a popular biopic *Camille Claudel* featuring Isabelle Adjani as the titular sculptor and Gerard Depardieu as Rodin. Her popularity has since grown, with the Musée Claudel being established in Nogent-sur-Seine in 2016.

Sotheby's New York Contemporary Curated



Untitled by Joan Mitchell

On Wednesday, February 26th, Christie's and Sotheby's began three straight days of twentieth-century and contemporary art. While things have been going well thus far, the Contemporary Curated sale at Sotheby's York Avenue location in New York was the one auction to remember. While the sale did feature many works by today's great living artists like Maurizio Cattelan, KAWS, and Kehinde Wiley, it also included some slightly older twentieth-century works of modern art by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, Robert Motherwell, Yves Klein, and Elaine de Kooning.

The work used by Sotheby's to promote the sale was also the painting clearly expected by the auction house to come out as the top lot. Sotheby's specialists gave an untitled 1985 oil painting by Joan Mitchell an estimate range of \$3 million to \$5 million.

Following her death in 1992, Mitchell bequeathed the painting to the seller, in whose possession it has remained since. The blues, greens, and a hint of red and orange are reminiscent of some of Monet's water lily paintings, a dialogue highlighted by an exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in 2023. The Mitchell received a bit of

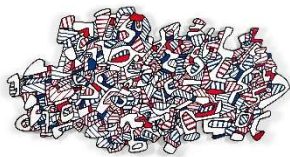
attention, just enough to put it over its minimum estimate, hammering at \$3.2 million (or \$3.95 million w/p).

Following up the Mitchell was another one of the sale's high-value lots. This one was a 2015 painting by George Condo called *Artist and Muse*. Sotheby's specialists wrote that in the painting, Condo synthesizes "the vigor of Abstract Expressionism, the rigor of Old Master portraiture, the wry humor of Pop art, all while being grounded in Picasso's revolutionary principles of Cubism." The Sotheby's specialists stressed Condo's relationship with Picasso and its influence on this painting. In particular, the connection between an artist and their muse was always an important component of Picasso's work. *Artist and Muse* eventually sold at its high estimate of \$1.5 million (or \$1.88 million w/p). And finally, there was a work by Jean Dubuffet. *Echec à l'être* is an acrylic painting on a piece of klegecell, a sort of PVC foam that became available to artists shortly after the end of the Second World War. Dubuffet created this work in October 1971, and it is typical of his later career's *Hourloupe* series, which he continued until 1974. It's part painting, part sculpture. Sotheby's specialists predicted it would sell for between



Artist and Muse by George Condo

\$800K and \$1.2 million. Several bidders seem to have had their eye on the work, with one final bid taking it over the top and snagging it for \$1.22 million (or \$1.54 million w/p).



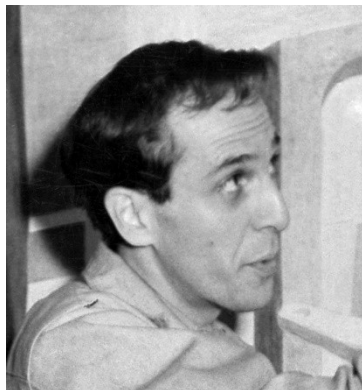
Echec à l'être by Jean Dubuffet

The Contemporary Curated sale had a few surprises, with six of the ninety-five available lots selling for more than double their high estimates. The biggest of them, however, came in the form of [a 2014 multimedia work on paper by Mel Bochner](#). It is made from a combination of collage, engraving, and embossment, and is based on the artist's *Blah Blah Blah* series of paintings, which she originally created between 2008 and 2012. Initially estimated to sell for no more than \$15K, the Bochner hammered at \$45K (or \$57.2K w/p), exactly three times the high estimate. Unfortunately, some of the more highly-valued lots failed to garner enough interest to meet their reserves. These include the Josef Albers painting [Gay Desert](#) (est. \$280K to \$350K), the Damien Hirst work [Propionic Anhydride](#) (est. \$200K to \$300K), and the Diane Arbus photograph [A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y.](#) (est. \$300K to \$500K). However, these unsold lots were not enough to make the sale tank.

An impressive thirty-five of the ninety-five lots sold within their estimates, giving Sotheby's specialists a 37% accuracy rate. With another fifteen lots (16%) selling below and twenty-three (24%) selling above, this left twenty-two lots unsold. This gave Sotheby's a 77% sell-through rate. Against a \$14.75 million total low estimate, the Contemporary Curated auction at Sotheby's New York brought in a total hammer of \$15.77 million (or \$19.88 million w/p).

Deeper Thoughts

Forgotten American Mural Unveiled In Mexico



Philip Guston

A 1934 mural by Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish at a regional museum in Mexico has been fully restored.

[The Struggle Against Terrorism](#) is a 1000-square-foot mural the two young artists created for the museum. Both the mural itself and its location play together in interesting ways. It is located in the Museo Regional Michoacano, a history museum in the city of Morelia, Michoacán's capital. The museum was first established in 1886 and moved into an eighteenth-century building previously used as a palace by the emperor Maximilian I. When Guston and Kadish were invited to create something for the museum, muralism was [a powerful artistic, social, and political force in Mexico](#). In the wake of the violence the Mexican Revolution had brought, the new government sought to create a new national identity and educate its people about it through public art. By employing artists like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, Mexico saw the birth of a new art form and a new national

identity based primarily on the beauty of *mestizaje*, or the mixture of European and indigenous blood and culture that made Mexico unique. Guston and Kadish were two young, Jewish-American leftist artists who brought much of their experience with prejudice and discrimination to the project.

Additionally, they were no doubt heavily inspired by Mexico's muralist movement and were recommended to the project by Siqueiros himself, who had met the pair while in Los Angeles. The mural features twisted bodies and figures wearing hoods, recalling imagery associated with both the Inquisition and the Klan. Instruments of torture lay scattered alongside swastikas, hammers, and sickles. However, not long after its creation, the mural soon fell into disrepair. The Mexican Revolution and its aftermath fomented social unrest between devout Catholics and anti-clerical progressives, [bubbling over into armed conflict](#). Conservative forces in the region considered the mural incredibly offensive, particularly the figures' nudity and the use of the cross. The museum was forced to hide it behind a canvas screen. The mural would remain hidden until the 1970s.

Before the restoration, the mural itself had faded, and much of the plaster on the wall had begun to crumble. Specialists concluded that the room was too humid for the mural to survive. Once they sufficiently renovated the

building to control the room's humidity, they began restoring the mural itself. Luckily for restorers, the original mural was [extensively photographed upon completion in 1935](#). So, restorers were able to replace the missing sections easily. While the efforts to completely restore the mural took about seven years, the actual hands-on restoration took about six months. The Philip Guston Foundation contributed about \$150,000 to the project.

Guston and Kadish would return from Mexico to work with the Works Progress Administration, a government organization that found work for people affected by the Great Depression. It employed scores of artists to create murals and other public works of art. Doubtless, many looked to Mexico and its muralist movement for inspiration, like Guston and Kadish had. But the world around them also provided its own inspiration. The two created the Morelia mural in a world where fascism was on the rise. Its renovation comes at a time when similar destructive forces are starting to rear their heads once more. Guston would use the imagery of oppression and resistance throughout his work for the rest of his career until he died in 1980. Sally Radic, executive director of the Guston Foundation, commented on the mural, its restoration, and its relevant message: "Sometimes, the stars align. And, you know, 90 years later, it's basically the same situation. But that depends upon your political viewpoint."

The restored mural was unveiled on January 31st.

Coming Soon: A Brand New Louvre

French President Emmanuel Macron announced that the Louvre will undergo extensive renovations, including placing the Mona Lisa in its own gallery, for which visitors will be charged extra.

The Louvre is home to roughly half a million works of art and attracts far more visitors than it is designed to receive. In 2024, 8.7 million people walked through the museum doors. While this made it the most-visited museum in the world, it doesn't even come close to its attendance record. That was set in 2018 when the Louvre attracted 10.2 million visitors. Some have estimated that the repurposed palace can only reasonably entertain 4 million people per year. The Louvre president, Laurence des Cars, has tried to ease the burden on the museum and its staff [by limiting daily visitorship to 30,000](#).



Mona Lisa

The French news network BFM estimates that renovating the Louvre could cost as much as €500 million. Other estimates put the cost as high as €800 million. While some sections of the Louvre have been redone recently, the last time the museum was extensively renovated was in the 1980s. Much of the future cost would involve building a new entrance by the River Seine to ease the crowding by I.M. Pei's glass pyramid. [Similar to the new Spanish Royal Collection building](#), there has also been talk of creating new galleries below ground. In a city as old and densely populated as Paris, it's understandable since expanding outward can often be difficult, costly, and time-consuming. The renovations are estimated to take ten years, with design competitions scheduled for the next few months. Also mentioned is a separate wing exclusively for the Mona Lisa, the museum's greatest attraction. It's somewhat sad to think that Veronese's *Wedding Feast at Cana*, the largest painting in the museum, has millions of backs turned to it each year because it stands directly across the gallery from that unassuming Da Vinci portrait. So, giving the Mona Lisa its own gallery makes some sense. No details have been given on how a new Mona Lisa gallery would be organized. Perhaps they should do so in pairs according to height. You walk by at a reasonable pace and are encouraged not to linger to ensure that no one is boxed out. Shorter people would not be kept from viewing the painting, there would be no ridiculous crowds, nor would there be any need for selfie sticks. Of course, I'm not saying that viewing the Mona Lisa should carry the same solemnity as visiting someone's mausoleum. But still...

Of course, the idea of tagging on an extra fee just to see the Mona Lisa is a bit of a double-edged sword. Logically, a ticket to enter the Louvre is, essentially, a ticket to view the Mona Lisa. As the star attraction of the museum, it seems rather superfluous. However, this could prove rather attractive to Paris locals or to other returning visitors who have likely already seen the Mona Lisa on a previous visit. Now, they can view the works by David and Géricault or the antiquities while having ample space to breathe, away from the throngs of tourists who are only there for one painting.

Friedrich's Soul Of Nature At The Met

On Saturday, February 8th, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York opened a new exhibition focusing on the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich. Despite Friedrich's importance and widespread popularity, the exhibition, entitled *The Soul of Nature*, is the first major museum show focusing on the artist in

the United States. As such, the show serves as a broad introduction to the artist and his work to an American audience.



Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog
by Caspar David Friedrich

According to the curators, Friedrich saw nature as “a site of emotional and spiritual discovery.” Furthermore, his paintings “mark the rise of an intimate response to the natural world that endures today.” This made Friedrich a monumental figure of Romantic art by placing humanity in its proper context relating to the natural world. This is apparent even before he ventured into oil painting. The first gallery visitors walk into features sketches and ink wash drawings, which was his specialty before seriously taking up oil painting in 1808. His ink-wash drawings made in the first decade of the nineteenth century echo the later oil paintings he would execute. [Eastern coast of Rügen with Shepherd](#), for example, seems incredibly similar to his later, more well-known oil painting *Monk by the Sea* (featured later in the exhibition): a lone figure placed not in the center of the work but towards the bottom to show the enormity of the landscape around them. Another common component in Friedrich’s work is showing faint traces of humanity even when no human figures are in the landscape: [an abandoned boat left on a rocky shore](#), or [the statue of a forest shrine](#), or [a simple cross left on a hilltop](#).

His work encapsulates some of the core tenets of Romantic art, through the combination of landscape and spirituality. The exhibition poses these questions: “is nature ‘the book of God’, to be experienced and interpreted alongside biblical texts as a source of revelation? Or does divinity reside in the harmonious totality of nature?” Many of the paintings will feature metaphors for the road to finding faith. His painting [Morning Mist in the Mountains](#) is probably the best example of this. A snowy, pine-dotted mountain emerges from a fogbank, while a small, almost imperceptible cross sits at its summit. This is meant to represent the long, difficult path to understanding both the natural world and finding salvation.

Contemplation was another theme of his work, which also carries its own religious and spiritual connotations. His paintings often featured figures or groups with their backs turned to the viewer as if we were viewing the scene along with them. This was a motif that other artists in his circle would adopt as well.



The Monk by the Sea by Caspar David Friedrich



Two Men Contemplating the Moon
by Caspar David Friedrich

While most of the exhibition seemed mainly expository, there was one aspect on which the Met curators took a stance. In recent years, scholarship on Friedrich has [pushed back against the previously common conception](#) of him as a misanthropic loner, creating his work in isolation. The Met exhibition follows this newer scholastic current, showing how Friedrich maintained great friendships, took on pupils, and fraternized with patrons. The exhibition also contained work by some of his friends and students, particularly Jentzsch, Carus, and Dahl, to compare and contrast contemporary trends in subject and form. Furthermore, despite Friedrich’s focus on nature, that didn’t mean the human world around him did not feature in his paintings. A single work stood out to me when I visited the exhibition: [The Chasseur in the Forest](#) shows a lone French soldier in Friedrich’s typical fashion, small and towards the bottom of the canvas to show the vastness of the trees. However, the curators note that Friedrich exhibited the

painting in Dresden in 1814, shortly after Napoleonic French troops left the city. It is said to represent the plight of Napoleon’s soldiers as they were leaving a country that had grown hostile to their presence. In the same gallery, Met curators also note how Friedrich featured oak trees in his other paintings, symbolizing German strength and identity. Some of the figures in his work wear very particular clothing that identifies them as young German men. In particular, medieval-style cloaks and black berets were popular among young liberal students in some of the German cities at the time, to the point that these articles of clothing had to be banned. Most notably, this clothing is seen in his *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, the 1830 version of which is owned by the Met and was on display.

Many of the paintings and other artworks were on loan from private collections and museums worldwide, mostly in Germany. These include the Hamburger Kunsthalle, which loaned *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, which sent over *Monk by the Sea*. It’s surprising to learn that until now, no other major American museum has ever dedicated an exhibition to Caspar David Friedrich. However, I suppose it’s better late than never. *The Soul of Nature* allows American audiences (and the hordes of foreign tourists the

Metropolitan Museum attracts) to fully understand the story of one of the giants of romanticism and, therefore, one of the great painters of nineteenth-century European art.

British Museum Makeover

Part of the British Museum will be completely redesigned, with the museum administration choosing architect Lina Ghotmeh's designs this weekend.



British Museum

The building that houses the British Museum dates back to the early to mid-nineteenth century. It was designed by Sir Robert Smirke in the popular Greek revival style, a testament to the architectural trends of its time. Originally intended to accommodate around 100,000 visitors per year, the museum's expansion and increased prominence during the height of the British empire led to a surge in visitors, putting great strain on the structure. The museum has long needed renovation to keep up with the crowds it attracts. The first stage in this redevelopment is redesigning the Western Range, which consists of all the galleries west of the Great Court, the large atrium visitors enter shortly after walking through the museum's front doors. These western galleries feature many of the museum's ancient artifacts, including Egyptian pieces like [the Rosetta Stone](#), Mesopotamian antiquities like [the Assyrian lion hunt reliefs](#), and the highly controversial [Greek sculptures taken from the Acropolis](#) in the early nineteenth century. The museum administration announced in May 2024 that it would accept submissions for new designs for these galleries.

Lebanese-born French architect Lina Ghotmeh, [whose designs were chosen](#), plans on bringing what she calls an "archaeological approach". And when you look at some of the images of what these galleries will eventually look like, you can sort of understand what she means by that. They look bright and spacious, with an extensive use of stone that brings a simultaneously modern yet ancient feel. They seem almost inspired by the palaces and temples of antiquity from which many of these artifacts originate. Museum director Nicholas Cullinan said the jury selected her designs because of "their beauty, sensitivity and ingenuity". Her firm's previous projects include the [Hermès Leather Workshop](#) and [the Estonian National Museum](#). Lina has also received many accolades, including the 2023 Great Arab Minds Award, the 2020 Schelling Architecture Award, and the 2016 Prix Déjean awarded by the Académie d'Architecture. She has also been nominated for the AFEX Grand Prix and the Mies van der Rohe Award.

The British Museum administration has stated that the construction will work to preserve the parts of the building designed by Smirke. They have also assured the public that this project will be executed over several phases, meaning that not all galleries will be closed simultaneously, allowing visitors to visit most of the museum at any given time. These redesigns are part of a larger "masterplan" that the British Museum's administration unveiled to modernize one of the world's largest cultural institutions. The plan includes creating a museum energy center to decrease reliance on fossil fuels; in theory, it will save 1,873 tons of carbon dioxide and make the building far more sustainable (that is, if they've abandoned their [environmentally unfriendly NFT digitization project](#)). This is rather ironic since British Petroleum [plans on donating £50 million](#) towards the redevelopment project.

Four Oldies, But Goodies

Dumb Things People Do at Art Fairs – Published in the Epoch Times (2014)



Howard Rehs

[Dumb Things People Do at Art Fairs](#) – here is one of my articles that was published in the Epoch Times today ... enjoy!

Our gallery started participating in art and antique shows more than 25 years ago, and over that time, I have witnessed some astounding behavior from people visiting our booth. This is a follow-up to my previous article, "Dumb Things People Say to Art Dealers."

Don't Touch the Artwork

Yes, people seem to like to touch the art. At a show in Baltimore, I was amazed, and shocked, as I watched a man bend down to look at a painting and proceed to run his fingers across the entire canvas.

Let me say this in the most polite way: the paintings in dealers' booths are their property; and unless they give you permission to touch them, don't! Personally, I do not want to see your fingers on my paintings—so until you own it, please do not touch it! Not only is it inappropriate, but if you also happen to damage the piece, are you ready to write a check?

Don't Be a Brochure Hog

These are people who walk into booths and take every piece of free printed material the gallery has (some take multiple copies); and the worst part is that most of these people never look at the works on display. Some of them even wheel around little carts to hold all their spoils.

I have always wondered what people do with all of the material they collect. Decoupage? Wallpaper the living room? Frame and hang the images? Sell them at a local flea market? Someone has got to let me know. Here is something these people need to keep in mind: all of that printed material costs the gallery money and each gallery only brings a limited supply to any particular show—so please don't become a brochure hog. And if you must take the items, at least spend a few moments looking at the original works hanging on the walls—at least the dealer will feel there might be a reason why you took the brochures.

Don't Be a Chair Hog

These are people who have no interest in the works being shown, but take a seat in someone's booth and sit there for an awfully long time (I have seen people sit in booths for more than one hour).

In addition, many of them see nothing wrong with talking on their cellphones the entire time they are seated. Sorry, but that is just rude. That booth is the dealer's place of business; so if you need to take a break, most shows offer public areas where you can sit, rest, and even talk on your phone. In addition, I do not want to overhear intimate details of your or your friend's personal life—especially in such a confined space.

Don't Be a Space Hog

These are people who block the entire front of your booth in order to stop and talk to their friends (and I have seen people stand in front of a booth for 30 minutes or more). Again, please have a little courtesy for the dealer. Not only do the booths cost a great deal of money, but we are also only there for a short period of time. If you need to catch up with old friends, find one of the public spaces in the show.

Don't Try to Pitch a Sale

I know that many people who work in art-related industries think that going to a show is a great opportunity to see a whole group of dealers in one location—and that is correct. But what you should remember is that the dealers have spent a lot of time and money to prepare for the show and want to spend their time talking with potential buyers and current clients. If you are going to stop by, then make it a quick hello—most of us do not want to spend 20 or 30 minutes (during the show hours) listening to a sales pitch.

Don't Take Photos Without Permission

While some dealers do not mind people taking photos of their works, others do. Do not assume that you can walk into someone's booth and photograph the works on display. It is important to ask before you start snapping away.

In addition, if they do give you permission, make it quick. I normally have no problem with people photographing our works—though I often wonder what they are going to do with the images.

At the recent show in Baltimore a woman stopped by our booth and asked if she could photograph one of our works. I told her no problem. Well, the next thing I know, five women are standing in our booth, blocking a large section of the entrance, taking dozens and dozens of photos.

As I have stated before, dealers participate in shows in order to sell their works—not to create a photo-op. And if that dealer is kind enough to let you photograph a work, please make it quick!

Please Corral Your Children

Before I get into this one, please keep in mind that I love children and have some of my own. However, it is really important when visiting an art or antique show that you keep a tight hold on your youngsters.

Many times, I have watched a toddler start running for a painting that is sitting on the floor, only to be scooped up moments before impact. In addition, try not to let your children bring toys that they may throw or swing—I have seen children playing with yo-yos or dragging their favorite toy behind them on a long string. I can tell you that is a recipe for disaster and maybe an unwanted expense.

Misrepresentation & Deception – The Auction World At Its Worst! (from 2021)



Jean B.C. Corot

(The names were changed, well removed, to protect the innocent and guilty)

On September 8th, I received an email stating:

Hello ~ Recently acquired what is being claimed as a JBC Corot painting. I have a small window within which to authenticate or return the piece. Please let me know if this is a service you could provide for this painting or any thoughts otherwise.

I replied, stating that the Corot expert, Claire Lebeau, is in France, and the authentication process is not always a quick one. Many times, experts want to see the work in question physically. I also stressed that the responsibility of ensuring a painting's authenticity should be the seller's, not hers.

She got back to me, asking if there was any way the authentication could be done just with some good photographs since she only had until September 27th to return the work. She also mentioned an art expert website called www.corotexperts.com, and that she considered contacting them, but there was little background on their expertise.

I gave her a call rather than write a long email explaining the difficulties of navigating the art world. I first mentioned that many websites claim to be run by experts; the true experts operate very few of them. These sites are managed by people trying to get money for something you can do by yourself. I also went into more detail about the authentication process and the expenses involved, not the least of which are the packing, shipping, temporary import paperwork for overseas experts, etc., which can run thousands of dollars. On top of all that, some authenticators also only examine works at specific times of the year – monthly, quarterly, etc.

During our conversation, she mentioned the work as bought at an auction in Maine and was not too expensive. I replied that if someone owned a painting that was potentially worth over \$100,000, would they offer it in a country sale with a very low estimate? I doubt it. Over the years, I have seen many instances where works were presented to experts who gave a negative opinion. Then, a year or two later, the same painting appeared at auction, cataloged as a genuine work by the artist. This has happened with some fake [Dupré](#) and Knight paintings I had previously evaluated, and sadly, they often sell!

I will add that the woman sent me images of the painting, and they seemed familiar to me (it turns out I saw it on the auctioneer's website before the sale). While the subject matter looked like something Corot would have painted, there were many red flags, not the least of which was the odd-looking red signature. I finished by saying that if someone walked into our gallery with the painting, we would not be interested in it.

Well, the next morning I received the following email:

Good Morning, Howard ~

Appreciate you taking the time to share your insights on the 'Corot' with me yesterday. Thank you.

I was able to connect with Claire. Am sharing her reply as you might be interested to know and so that you are aware of the practices of this particular auction house. Evidently, B.G. (Marketing Director for ... Auctions) reached out to Mr. Dieterle [Claire's father] with this painting last August. They offered a 'preliminary opinion.'

Claire was kind enough to share the documentation of this and in her words:

"We already expertized this painting in 2020 and answered it was not by Corot : it looked to us very far from his technic and pictural writing, this is confirmed by the signature badly imitated."

This echoes your observations on these aspects...so, a good eye there.

She also asked the following – Can an auction house or an individual be held accountable for intentionally misrepresenting artwork? How can work like this be prevented from being recirculated into what I imagine is an endless cycle of faux pieces falling into as endless a line of unsuspecting (or naively optimistic) hands?

I called her back to explain that this sort of action goes on all the time, and almost nothing is done to curtail it. As for any civil legal remedies, the fact that an attorney would charge tens of thousands of dollars to handle a case like this makes it unaffordable for the average person. The only way to stop the saleroom from doing this again would be to contact the state's Attorney General and see if a criminal action is warranted. But again, I doubt anything will happen.

The following day we decided to do a little more research on the painting and discovered that the auction house first offered the 'Corot' in February 2016 as 'Manner of J.B.C. Corot', with a \$10-20K estimate and it did not sell. Then in May 2016, it appears they sold it for \$4,000 (est. \$10-20K), also cataloged as 'Manner of...'. In August 2020, it was resold at the same saleroom as a [Jean Baptiste Camille Corot](#) (no Manner of) for \$6,500 (est. \$10-20K). Finally, in August of this year, the painting was back up for sale and sold for \$13,000 (est. \$10-20K).

What I found very interesting is that before they attempted to have the work authenticated, it was sold as 'Manner of'. After the experts rejected the work, it was being sold as an authentic painting. Go figure!

It is vital that as you travel through the art world, you connect with reputable people, those who have had decades of experience in the area you are looking to collect. As I have always said – the art world is a jungle, be sure to find the right guide before becoming someone's next meal.

A Story About Altering Provenance (2020)

As we have always said, every work has a provenance, but the full provenance of every work is not always known. Now, you should expect that when one of the major auction rooms offers a work, they will do their best to have as complete a provenance as possible. Well, as you will soon see, that is not always the case.

In November of 2019, our gallery acquired a beautiful still life by the Vietnamese artist Le Pho. In July, a collector of Vietnamese art purchased the painting and was very happy with it. In October, while looking through all the auction sites, we noticed that a Modern & Contemporary sale was taking place in Hong Kong and decided to see what was included. Lo and behold, the Le Pho we sold was in the sale with an estimate of HK\$150-260K (\$19,335-33,514) ... which was much less than we sold it for. It seemed odd, but what do I know?



Le Pho

Anyway, while looking at the catalog entry, I noticed the following provenance:

Wally Findlay Galleries, USA
Acquired from the above gallery by the previous owner
Private Collection, USA

I found it strange that they were inferring that our gallery bought it from Wally Findlay, when, in fact, we bought it from a collector who acquired it years ago. Also, our name 'Rehs' and the inventory number are visible on the stretcher. On October 12th, I decided to write an email to Christie's and let them know that their cataloging was incorrect.



Verso

I noticed that you are offering a painting by Le Pho – lot 19. Your provenance is not complete. We sold that painting this year (I assume to the seller).

https://rehs.com/Le_Phو_Les_Tulipes_Tulips_Viburnum_and_Anemones.html

You will also note in the image you feature on your site that the name REHS (along with our inventory number) is written at the bottom of the stretcher.

On the 15th I received a reply from Winnie Wan:

Dear Mr Rehs,

Thank you very much for highlighting the provenance of lot 19.

We generally do not include past auction records from auction houses apart from Christie's and Sotheby's. Hence, for us this auction record is considered complete. However, for any enquiries we can mention it. Should you have further concerns, please feel free to contact us.

My reply to Ms. Wan:

We are not an auction house ... we have an art gallery in New York City. We bought that painting and then sold it to the individual who is now selling it. [W]e owned the painting outright (had clear title), so your provenance is not complete as stated in the catalog. Of course, you can sell it as you see fit, but do note that I have now told you your provenance is incomplete.

I never received a reply. Now I am sure you are thinking, what did the painting make? HK\$625,000 (\$80,634) ... yes, that was more than we sold it for.

The word 'provenance', according to the dictionary, is a record of ownership of a work of art or an antique, used as a guide to authenticity or quality. The key word here is 'ownership.' As a previous owner, the gallery's name should have been included. Also, an auction room should almost never be included in the provenance since they never (or rarely) own the work being sold. They are a middleman, and as they have always stated, title passes from the seller to the buyer when the hammer falls.

We see this time and again, auction rooms leaving out parts of the provenance that might make the sale more difficult. The salerooms are always trying to make people believe they are being as transparent as possible ... obviously, that is a bunch of ...

Why Does Our Legal System Allow This? (2019)

A few months ago we received an email from a writer at ArtNet asking if we wanted to comment on a lawsuit that was filed claiming our website (and those of over 100 other dealers) was not ADA compliant. What? Whoever heard that a website had to be ADA compliant? Not us, and no one we spoke with in our industry.

What happened next?

First, we contacted our insurance broker to see if we had coverage and received the following reply: *We have received several of these emails from several other galleries and have forwarded a request for coverage analysis to Chubb Group, the insurer for your General Liability Insurance. They are reviewing this suit per the attached confirmation, but we do not believe there is any coverage for this as this policy is designed to provide bodily injury/property damage.*

*Traditionally there may be limited coverage under an Employment Practices Liability policy for **legal expenses only**, which would be subject to the policy deductible. We have offered this coverage in the past, however, it was not purchased. Additionally, we believe the resolution of this complaint will most likely fall under a standard policy deductible, and no insurance payment would be made anyway.*

There are opportunities to join other art galleries facing the same complaint and prepare a joint response, thus reducing costs.

After that, I knew this was going to cost us a chunk of change!

Then we called our webmaster, [Frank Imburgio](#), to discuss the matter. Frank had recently dealt with the ADA matter for another client, in a different industry, who was hit with a similar suit. Within a month, our website was brought up to “code.” Now, the worst part of all this is that there are no specific guidelines, from our government, as to what makes a website compliant! Because of that, every industry is now a target for these lawsuits.

As I am sure you can guess, our next step was to hire an attorney and start the legal process. Initially, we spoke with Judith Wallace ([Carter Ledyard & Milburn LLP](#)), Douglas Rowe ([Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman, LLP](#)), and Joseph DiPalma ([Jackson Lewis P.C.](#)). All three gave us great advice and could have easily handled the case; however, in the end, we decided to hire DiPalma since he was already representing about 20 galleries and had past dealings with the plaintiff’s lawyers (the idea was power in numbers). All three attorneys explained that these cases are brought by a select group of attorneys who are just looking to ‘make money’. They know that the cost to defend a case can run into the six figures (yes, over \$100,000), so people settle. What I found most interesting, is that the plaintiff is only entitled \$500 for each action, while the attorney gets their fees (or the balance of the money received) ... and depending on the industry, settlements have run \$10,000, \$15,000, \$25,000 and more. Now multiply any of those numbers by 100 ... SICK!

While I was dealing with this, Lance started doing a little research and came across a study by the Lawsuit Reform Alliance of New York released last year titled “[Serial Plaintiffs: The Abuse of Title III](#)” — something I recommend everyone read.

Here is my question — When will our government enact laws to prevent this abuse? Oh wait, I just did a Google search and discovered that – *According to the Congressional Research Service 170 members of the House and 60 Senators are lawyers. Out of a total of 435 U.S. Representatives and 100 Senators (535 total in Congress), lawyers comprise the biggest voting block of one type, making up 43% of Congress. Sixty percent of the U.S. Senate is lawyers. Guess they are in no rush!*

Source: [As ‘Serial Plaintiffs’ Target Art Gallery Websites for Disability Act Violations, Some Are Settling—or Scrambling to Get Up to Code](#)

The Rehs Family
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